

opportunity and snow goose hunting opportunity through the Light Goose Conservation Order. Extending the Canada goose season later into January delays the opening of the Conservation Order. We included a question on the Snow Goose Post Season Harvest Survey after the 2003 season to determine if South and Southeast Zone hunters preferred delaying the Conservation Order to provide additional late season Canada goose hunting opportunity. Only 17% of goose hunters in this zone specialize in hunting only snow geese and 88% of them opposed delaying the Conservation Order. Most goose hunters in the South and Southeast zones hunt Canada geese only and 82% of them support delaying the Conservation Order to provide late Canada goose hunting opportunity. Similarly, 72% of individuals who hunt Canada geese and snow geese support delaying the conservation order.

### **Future Challenges:**

Shorter seasons are inevitable when drought conditions occur and waterfowl populations decline. We expect shorter seasons will result in more disagreement about preferred season dates. However, the same suite of hunter survey data, including week most preferred to hunt and the week preferred for the season to open will provide guidance. Preferences for the opening week in a 4-week season provide indications of the “core” duck season. Based on our surveys of duck hunter preferences, the week most preferred to hunt is, on average, within 2 weeks of hunters’ preferred times to open a 4-week season. In an 8-week season, the gap widens to just under 3 weeks in the North Zone and over 3 weeks in the South Zone. Hunters generally prefer later season opening dates in shorter seasons; however, there is much more disagreement about when the seasons should occur.

## **OUTLOOK FOR THE 2005 MISSOURI SEASON**

Expectations should be tempered by estimates of total breeding duck numbers similar to last year, 5% below the long-term average and more than 25% below the record high of 43.4 million in 1999. The good news this year is that after several years of drought, significant precipitation returned to primary duck breeding areas in southern Canada. Although much of this occurred too late for early nesting species such as mallards, improved wetland conditions during June should contribute to high brood survival and strong reneesting efforts. In addition, above average precipitation during summer should promote vegetation growth and wetlands should be in relatively good condition going into the fall. Goose production was generally good in 2005 and is expected to be higher than last year and average to above average when compared to the long-term.

Weather, habitat, and migration timing will have a greater impact on the season in Missouri than the size of the fall flight. Although conditions could change by fall, as of early August, significant precipitation is needed to ensure favorable habitat conditions in Missouri. Hot, dry weather has limited growth and development of row crops over much of the state. Projections of above normal use of crops for silage production and early harvest may result in earlier than average tillage which could affect the availability of waste grain. The hot weather may affect growth, development and species composition of wetland vegetation. Continued lack of precipitation could also affect water management capabilities on public and private wetlands. The Missouri River navigation season is scheduled to end 48 days earlier than normal due to low reservoir levels in the Dakotas. If rains in Missouri do not maintain fall river levels, this could

result in reduced pumping capabilities at public (e.g., Bob Brown CA, Grand Pass CA, and Eagle Bluffs) and private wetlands along the Missouri River.

Regardless of needed improvements in habitat conditions, Missouri hunters will once again have a 60-day duck season and a 70-plus day Canada goose season from which to select their hunting days. Season dates should continue to provide the opportunity for a variety of hunting styles, including early and late season hunting preferences.